

FEET OF GOLD ¹

By GORDON ARTHUR SMITH

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I

WHEN Ferdinand Taillandy, poet, pagan, and wanderer on the face of the earth, had completed his great epic he felt, surging high within him, the call of Paris. For eight years he had traversed on foot the untrammelled wilds, keeping his ear ever close to the breast of nature, that his soul might be in tune with her moods. For eight years he had worshipped nature, seeking no divinity save her, and finding in her one god made manifest in many forms. To his deep-seeing eyes there were dryads lurking in the trees and in the glades and in the groves; there were naiads in the springs and in the rivers and in the lakes; there were nereids in the seas, and always there was Pan, piping in the forests or on the hills. And so he bent the knee to all nature, and knew no other god but her.

But, his epic finished, he craved, like all poets, a publisher — he was not content to sing merely to himself. And, moreover, he knew that the epic was good. The need of a publisher, then, was his pretext for turning his face to the north and to Paris, but it was scarcely this need that so quickened his feet and his heart. It was more than that, certainly — it was rather the exhilaration that the exile feels when he is about to return home.

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Said Taillandy to himself: "I left Paris of my own will; I despise Paris; Paris has caused me only great suffering; Paris is neither Christian nor pagan; if I go to Paris I am a retrograde—but, oh, ye gods, hasten my feet and strengthen my heart, that I may get to Paris the more quickly!"

This is comprehensible and excusable only because Paris was his first home. Granting that (and any one will vouch for it), the conclusion is as inevitable as that of a geometrical proposition, and we can wonder only that he resisted the homing instinct so long.

He went north by forced marches, following the Rhone through Avignon and Valence to Lyon, and the Saône to Chalon; thence, by Dijon, Tonnerre, Sens, and Melun, to Paris and the Porte de Charenton. The last twenty-five kilometres he made during the night, for something kept him at it, made him loath to stop and sleep with the goal so close.

It was a thick, heavy morning, then, in November when he passed through the *octroi* and said to himself: "I am home." And it was a morning of mist that was almost rain. The stallions, harnessed in single file to the market-carts, were slipping on the treacherous cobblestones, straining with all their magnificent shoulders at the traces—supremely willing but not always successful. Taillandy, appreciative of the play of their muscles, stopped to admire them; and while he stopped he became aware of a woman standing at his elbow.

He did not trouble to look at her, for women, as individuals, were of little account in his life. He had loved one woman once and been sorry for it. That was enough. Perhaps she had been afraid of his intensity; perhaps he had given her too much of himself; perhaps he had endeavored to halo mortal clay—or perhaps she had been simply a timorous, flexible little thing with an empty blond head and a heart that he, at least, had been unable to quicken. At any rate, I know that she had told him that she loved him, and then the first breeze of

parental opposition had blown her into another man's arms. That is the story — we will not strive to place the blame.

To Taillandy, then, women were interesting only *en masse*: they stood for something, they *must* stand for something. After all, one half the population of the earth could not exist merely that children might be born. No, there was doubtless some mystery about them that accounted for their existence — above all, that accounted for their power. Why else should they (as they undoubtedly did) motivate men? Why should they have swayed nations and killed kings? He gave it up, but he continued, nevertheless, his ardent worship of Diana the Huntress and of Venus Genetrix.

The woman who stood at Taillandy's elbow was, at first glance, in no way a remarkable person, and it was by sheer accident that they came to know each other. A slippery pavement, three stallions harnessed to an overloaded cart, a quick-tempered driver — there was the accident, and there the beginning of Taillandy's further education in women.

The cart had stopped in the middle of the road, just within the gates, and the three stallions seemed powerless to move it an inch forward. Obviously this delayed traffic, and of course the *agent de police* on duty became flushed and excited, imparting much of his mood to the driver of the cart. The driver unsheathed his whip, short of handle and long and cruel of lash, and sent it circling and shivering across the back of the leader. It was poor policy, for the animal had not been unwilling. At the stroke he started, slipped, and plunged in the traces; his hoofs struck sparks from the pavement as they slid and floundered, struggling in vain for a foothold, and finally, snorting and writhing, his legs went from under him and he fell over on his side.

The woman next to Taillandy gave a little cry, half fear and half pity, and clutched at his arm. When he

turned he saw that she was very white — and not unbeautiful.

"Come," he said, "let us get out of this. There is nothing one can do when beasts are whipping beasts."

She tottered, clinging to his elbow.

"I think," she said, "that I am going to faint."

"I am sorry; try not to for a moment," he recommended.

He almost carried her to the nearest sidewalk café, put her into an iron chair behind an iron table, and ordered a cognac.

She drank it and shivered at the heat of it.

"Thank you, monsieur," she said. Then, slowly and for the first time, she raised her eyes to look at him.

Taillandy still clung to his thirties, and his eight years of nomadic life had kept him young and buoyant. He was not handsome — he was remarkable. Once you had seen him you would never forget him: those eyes with the sparkle of the poet burning in them; that thin, brown face with the crooked mouth and the hawk's nose; those slim, capable hands; and that lean, restless body, jutting out angularly from his abominable clothes.

The woman looked at him, and her eyes widened in astonishment. Looking at her, he reflected that astonishment became her. She was at her best expressing astonishment.

"I am very hideous, am I not?" he remarked pleasantly — almost casually.

Recovering herself, she looked quickly away, and answered very demurely and properly.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; of course you are not at all hideous. And I am very grateful to you. You were kind — and — and I am afraid that I detain you."

He laughed a little — quietly, as men laugh who are accustomed to being alone.

"My dear," said he, "from what do you detain me? Am I not in Paris where I wish to be? What more can

I desire? Should I some day scale Olympus and be admitted through the gates, do you suppose that, once inside, I should object to being detained by — well, let us say by Diana?"

She did not follow this flight — naturally not — but she caught at the last word.

"Diane!" she exclaimed. "How strange that you should have guessed my name!"

"You are called Diane?" he inquired.

"But yes," she affirmed.

"*Et voilà*," said he, stretching out his hands as if he had won his case. "You see? Great is Diane! — Diane of what? — of the Ephesians?"

She shook her head, at a loss.

"No," she said — "of Evremont-sur-Seine."

The name must have awakened some memory for him, for he frowned and squinted up his eyes.

"No, no — don't tell me," he commanded, as she was about to speak. "Let me think. Evremont-sur-Seine . . . Ah! I have it! A little village on the river with poplars patrolling the banks. A little iridescent village, all light and bright and clean — with a watering-trough in the square — and sparrows. Yes, hundreds of sparrows. And a lark or two for the morning. And a shop where, if one is a Christian, one should take off one's hat and kneel. Ah, yes — now I remember, now I remember! She was called Madame Nicolas, she who kept the shop, and she was a saint. I am no Christian — I am a pagan — but Madame Nicolas . . . Ah, well, one does not have to be a Christian to do homage to a Christian saint."

He was carried out of himself; he was aglow with the enthusiasm of remembering; and he was disappointed to find that Diane remained quiet, unkindled.

"You don't know, then," he protested — "you don't know Madame Nicolas?"

She shook her head, and he perceived, at length, that she was crying as quietly and secretly as possible.

"Ah," said he softly, and then again, "Ah!" But for the present he said no more about Madame Nicolas. Rather he arose, called loudly for the check, paid it, put his hand on her shoulder, and, with great heartiness, exclaimed: "Now we shall go and breakfast. You are hungry and so am I. We shall traverse Paris and breakfast at the Closerie des Lilas, where, once upon a time, I was at home. Come — *allons, mon enfant! En avant!*"

She protested — not very vehemently. She claimed she was not a cheerful companion; he had better seek some one else; it was one of her sad days. Besides, she was not well dressed — her shoes and her blouse . . . He laughed loudly, pointed to his own rags, and more especially to the hole in the top of his hat which revealed his straight, long black hair.

"What do we care for clothes!" he cried. "Are we not young and beautiful? Diana and — and Pan. Hand in hand they will now enter a *fiacre!*"

He was not to be thwarted in his holiday mood. Moreover, for some reason or other, the thought of quitting her displeased him. He wanted a companion to encourage him, to laugh at and with him, above all to listen to him. Perhaps he was beginning at last to realize in a small way why it is good that women exist.

Taillandy, at least, enjoyed that drive to the full. He was thrusting his head constantly from the windows to point out places that he remembered and places that he would never forget. At first they kept to the Seine — he could n't see enough of the Seine — and he prided himself on his ability to call each bridge by its name.

"Presently," said he, "when we have passed the Halle aux Vins, we shall come to the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Then we shall leave the river. . . . There, what did I tell you? *Au revoir*, Seine! Hail, Musée de Cluny and École de Médecine! To the left, *cocher!* One must see the Odéon. Ah, the famous days — and the famous nights, *parbleu!*"

Always he grew more eager, more excited. By Zeus, was he not back again in his own Paris after eight years? Why, then, pretend to be calm? Diane, of course, had not attempted to suggest that he be calm. She liked him the way he was — tempestuous, vibrant, a boy.

They drew up with a flourish in front of the Closerie des Lilas on the Boulevard du Montparnasse. It was his favorite haunt in the old days, in the old days eight years ago when he damned women and strove to forget them all because one had forgotten him. There it was that men had first called him great; there it was that, when he was sober, much of his early poetry had been written; and there it was that they had crowned him king. He found that, as he paid the driver, his eyes were dim.

"My dear," said he to Diane, "if you don't make me laugh, I shall begin to cry."

"What is it that troubles you?" she asked, a hand on his arm.

He smiled crookedly and answered: "Eight years of absence — that is all."

"It is a great deal," said she soberly. "I understand."

He changed his mood with an effort, and became deliberately gay.

"Ah, well," he cried, "we shall see what is altered. We shall see whether they still remember Ferdinand Taillandy."

He was not kept long in doubt. A waiter in shirt-sleeves and apron who was brushing the floor, stood up from his task as they entered, and, seeing Taillandy, raised his hands heavenward in a delirium of joy and astonishment.

"But it is Monsieur Ferdinand!" he cried. "Or else perhaps his ghost!"

Taillandy, jubilant at the immediate recognition, extended two hands and said warmly: "My good Hippolyte — my good Hippolyte!"

A buxom lady in black came hurrying out from behind

her high desk, her fingers busy at her hair (for she was not too young to be vain).

"Monsieur Ferdinand!" she exclaimed—"is it truly you returned to us? You will kill us with such sudden joy!" And she put a hand to her heart—or as close to her heart as her figure permitted.

"Dear Madame Maupin," answered Ferdinand, embracing her frenziedly. "You grow younger and more beautiful each year. Of what marvellous waters do you drink?"

"Always the Vichy Celestins," she answered; and then she slapped him cooly and said: "*Vieux blagueur!*"

For some minutes they stood off to appraise him, to take him all in, to see what changes eight years had wrought in him. Diane, temporarily neglected, hung in the background until Taillandy, feeling that she was ill at ease, led her forward by the arm and presented her to Madame Maupin as "his little friend Diane."

"But I know Mademoiselle Diane," said the *caissière*. "Were you not here two nights ago with Monsieur Bruno, the artist?"

Diane nodded and blushed, looking quickly at Taillandy and as quickly away.

"Yes, madame," she said.

"Ah," said Taillandy—"with old Bruno, hein? I am surprised that that one still lives. And how do you like old Bruno?"

"He was—kind," answered Diane; "and I had had nothing to eat for two days. Yes, he was kind. He fed me."

"It was the least he could do!" exclaimed Taillandy—"the old satyr!"

Then he turned on her so suddenly that she started back with a little cry, frightened.

"And now!" he cried—"and now! How long is it since you have eaten? Answer me that. Or does Bruno still feed you?"

"I have left Monsieur Bruno," she replied after an in-

terval. "I lost my position with the modiste on the Rue du Cherche-Midi. It was my own fault, because I did not apply myself to the work."

"How long is it since you have eaten, I ask?" interrupted Taillandy fiercely.

"When I met you, monsieur," she said bravely, "I was going to breakfast."

He grunted his disbelief.

"Where were you going to breakfast? At the Porte de Charenton? Not likely."

"I was going home to breakfast."

"Ah, you were going home? To Evremont-sur-Seine? Twenty-six kilometres, *hein?*"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And how were you going?"

"I was planning to walk, monsieur," she said.

"Ah — *voilà!* Now at last we have it. You were going to walk twenty-six kilometres for your breakfast because you didn't have a copper sou. That pig of a Bruno! Why do the gods allow such tragedies on earth! Here, Hippolyte — hasten thyself — covers for two, and all that is best in the house. The poor child starves while we air our vocabularies. It is criminal — it is unbelievable. *Allez — heup!*"

She permitted him to lead her to a seat — he did it in the grand manner, but cheerfully and with many lavish gestures, gallantly pretending that he did not see tears in her eyes. And while they ate he regaled her with a spirited monologue. He dwelt much on her name — that seemed to delight him — and he elaborated on it, calling her his Diana of the Moon, or his Goddess of the Chase. It amused him to pretend that they were feasting on Olympus. She, of course, was unable to follow his rhetoric, but so long as he enjoyed himself she was pleased; and she ate with a good appetite and no affectation.

When she had finished the *omelette aux fines herbes* the color came back into her cheeks and she was able to

laugh with him. He bade Hippolyte, whom for the moment he had christened Bacchus, to fetch them some red wine from the cellar — "a good wine, Bacchus, not too heavy; a wine in which one can taste the grapes."

It was forthcoming, and he drank her health very gravely — her health and her *beaux yeux*; for he now perceived for the first time that she had large, dark eyes.

At the coffee he stretched his long legs straight out under the table, lighted a cigarette, and sighed comfortably and profoundly.

"Now," said he, with a smile at his mouth, "I will talk about myself. Shall you like that?"

"But yes," she encouraged him naively; "you talk so well. You must have studied a great deal. I, as you see, am very ignorant. I know nothing."

He laughed quietly.

"Come," he said, "that is not so. You know a great deal. You knew enough to start for home when you were hungry. I, on the contrary, when I was hungry — I went away from home and lost myself for eight years. But it was not food-hunger that drove me away. Rather it was the hunger for consolation. That is why I went alone. One communes better with nature when one is alone. You see, the stars will not sing for an audience, and the trees will not whisper to a crowd. And the nymphs — ah, yes, my friend, the nymphs are shy."

He paused, not to contemplate her, but, perhaps, to contemplate his thoughts.

"You are a poet," said she, her eyes large with wonder and admiration.

"I hope so," he answered — "I hope so."

"You are a great poet," she continued, with growing awe.

"I thank you," said he. "At least I am not a prolific one."

This brought him up to the remembrance of his epic and the reason for his being in Paris. I think that he had been in a fair way to forget both — he was so completely

at home there at his favorite table, that the eight years of wandering and working seemed scarcely to have intervened.

"Ha!" he exclaimed—"that brings me to myself. I have work to do this morning. I must see my publisher. And you, my Diane, what do you intend to do?"

She shrugged her shoulders. What was there for her to do? He questioned her a little. Did she desire to return home to Evremont-sur-Seine? She did not dare. She was afraid they would not want her. But had she not thought to return there this morning when he had met her at the Porte de Charenton?

"Yes, monsieur," she said in a very low voice. "I was very tired and I had not eaten, and—and I knew that I should not be able to walk that far. But I thought that it would be better to try."

He looked at her searchingly. Then said he: "What you mean to say is that you thought it would be better to drop by the roadside than to fall into the river."

She nodded. "Yes, monsieur. I was not happy."

"Compassionate gods!" he cried, banging the table with his fist. "You were not happy! There speaks Mélisande. No, indeed, you were not happy! You were wretched, you were miserable, you were starving, and your poor little heart was dying within you—fluttering and trembling like a stricken bird. There, that is the city for you—that is the city's work."

Here, forgetting his recent enthusiasm for that self-same city, he relapsed into the mood of bitterness and distrust that had driven him from Paris eight years ago. He condemned the city and everything connected with it—it was artificial, it was brutal, it was sordid, it was ugly, it was selfish, it was a tyrant. It stifled the heart and it murdered the soul.

His philippic ending as abruptly as it had begun, he reached across the table and took her hand.

"Listen, my little one," he said, "listen to me. You are too young and too sweet to remain in this pest-hole.

I am going to care for you from now on — you shall be my charge. I am going to snatch you from the maw of this monster of a city before it gets your heart and your soul as well as your body. It will be one good deed at least credited to the account of Ferdinand Taillandy before he dies. They can carve it on my tombstone if they wish: 'He plucked a flower from the mire of a Christian city and planted it in the garden of the gods.' Ha! That is something to have done, is it not? And I shall revel in it. To-morrow we shall start — you and I. To-morrow in the clean, white dawn. And I will lead you to the garden. I will take you by the hand and show you the wide spaces of the world; and you shall behold the sun with new eyes; and the breeze shall blow through your unbound hair; and you shall bathe in the streams and rest on the sweet earth and sleep dreamlessly under the singing stars! . . . Will you come with me?"

She hesitated. His eloquence had her bound hand and foot, and at his nod she would have followed him to the world's end. She was commencing to worship him; but she was a woman and it was a woman's reason that made her hesitate.

"I have nothing to wear, monsieur —" she began timidly.

He swept the objection aside with a grand gesture of his arm.

"So much the better!" he cried. "We shall travel the lighter. Will you come with me?"

She thrilled to his enthusiasm. She was proud to be his follower.

"I will go with you anywhere," she said, "whenever you say you are ready." And she gave him her two hands across the table as a pledge. He took them, sawed them violently up and down in the air, reached over and kissed her fraternally on the forehead.

"Good!" he said. "Meet me here for dinner at seven this evening. We will plan. Now I go to my publisher. *Au revoir.*"

Before she realized it he was out of the room; but, as suddenly, he was back again.

"Here," he explained, "I had almost forgotten. One must pay to live and we shall be separated for ten hours. Take this and buy yourself some solid boots and some thick stockings. One should be well shod to climb Olympus."

II

That was a memorable night at the Closerie des Lilas — and not only that night, but, I regret to say, several ensuing nights; for Taillandy, to Diane's chagrin, could not bear to tear himself away from the city and his old disciples and comrades. Once more he forgot how intensely he hated Paris, remembering only how madly he loved it. The pagan child of nature reverted and became the *boulevardier* and the *café prophet*.

But that first night was responsible for the lapse. Taillandy enjoyed himself so hugely on that first night that it was only human of him to crave a second and a third. It was always: "To-morrow morning, my little Diane, we will leave all this behind us," and always on the morrow there was some unreasonable reason why the departure should be postponed.

Diane, disappointed grievously at first, grew depressed and then worried. Had her great godlike poet, then, feet of clay? She thrust the suspicion resolutely from her as unworthy, and instead, womanlike, she endeavored to see what she could do to help him. She knew that he was too good to be wasting his days and his nights in the Closerie des Lilas. She knew, too, that champagne is no fitting diet for poets — especially for poets who are great enough to be inspired without it — and so she found herself mothering her hero. Worshipping him, of course — she would always do that — but mothering him at the same time. A curious state of affairs.

Taillandy's publishers, it seemed, had been exuberantly

glad to see him. His "Triomphe de l'Amour" and his "Tombeau de l'Amour" had made him famous, and his eight years of absence had given him a sort of posthumous halo. If he were not dead, why, so much the better. In brief, they gave him a thousand francs in advance for the epic and a generous royalty on its sale.

Of that thousand francs Taillandy spent seven hundred and ninety-six during the next four days — ninety-six, possibly, on himself, and the balance on his friends.

He had returned to the Closerie des Lilas that first afternoon and had instructed Hippolyte and Madame Maupin that he intended to entertain that evening from dinner-time to dawn. They were to invite any and all of his old associates whom they should see. Everything in the house was to be free, and he, by Bacchus, would foot the bills.

The result was that when Taillandy entered the Lilas at seven o'clock he was amazed to discover what an army of friends he could lay claim to. Never had the café been so crowded.

There was Bruno, the artist, who, he remembered with an inexplicable pang, was also Diane's friend; there was Jacques Gaumont, a minor poet who was attempting to follow in the great Taillandy's footsteps, and who succeeded merely in being very shabbily dressed and very enthusiastic; there was Baskoff, the Russian, a sculptor of the futurist school, half mad and wholly unprepossessing; there was *le petit* Martel, in velveteens, who cried loudly for a return to the good old days of Bohemia, but who sometimes dined surreptitiously at the Café de Paris in full-dress clothes with a *chapeau à huit reflets*; there were the two bearded, gray-headed veterans who remembered Delacroix and very little else; there was a young architect or two from the Beaux-Arts, and there were a score of others — nondescripts, driftwood, some of them mad but talented, others mediocre but sane. Also, there were a dozen girls — models, midinettes, dancers, and daughters of joy.

At Taillandy's entrance they arose with a roar of delight. They embraced him, they kissed him on both cheeks, they pounded his back, they cheered him deafeningly. He was the only one of them worth while, and subconsciously they knew it and acknowledged it. Moreover, since he had once been one of them, they now felt a certain responsibility in his success. Had they not contributed to his greatness by their encouragement? Had he not perhaps imbibed some of his inspiration from their companionship? There was not a man there that did not envy his fame, but there was not a man there that begrudged it.

When the first commotion had somewhat subsided, Taillandy commanded Hippolyte to serve dinner. But first he inquired for Diane. Had any one seen Diane?

"Has any one seen whom?" asked Bruno, who was at his elbow.

"Diane — Diane," answered Taillandy impatiently. And then, remembering, he added, with a frown: "You know her, Bruno, I believe. At least it was not your fault that she did not starve."

"Ah, you wrong me," said the artist. "I would have fed her for life, but she would not permit it. She left me — she disappeared."

"She did well," replied Taillandy gravely.

Bruno looked at him quizzically, shrugged his shoulders and went to take his place at a table.

"Our Ferdinand is in love," he announced. "That will mean some very bad lyrics, I fear. It is regrettable."

Taillandy remained at the door, smoking furiously, with an eye on the clock. He would not sit down, he said, until Diane arrived. No, nor would he drink. There would be plenty of time for that.

Presently the door opened and Diane stepped hesitatingly into the smoke-stained light of the restaurant. She was a little out of breath, for she had been walking fast, and there was color in her cheeks and a wet sparkle in her eye.

"Ah, my little one," said Taillandy, "you are late."

"I am sorry," she answered. "I hurried as fast as I could. See, I have bought the stout boots and the thick stockings, as you desired me to do, so that we might climb — what was that mountain?"

"Olympus," said he. "You were wise, for it is a hard climb. Come now and sit down. I have kept a place for you on my right. You will eat while I talk; and you need not listen, for I shall talk nonsense. I intend that this, my one night in Paris, shall be remembered. It is to be a very gay night."

"But we start at dawn to-morrow, do we not?" she reminded him.

"Assuredly, assuredly. That is why we must make the most of these few hours."

He installed her beside him with great ceremony, as if she were the queen of a carnival. Then he motioned to Hippolyte to open the champagne. . . .

Toward midnight Taillandy, in response to repeated toasts to himself and his work, rose rather unsteadily to his feet and made a speech.

"Friends — comrades," he began — "and fellow artists, no man is better than his neighbor: therefore there is no reason why I should be called upon to speak ahead of any other man present. All of us are alike in that all of us are seeking, each in his own way, the Truth. Naturally, since all of us are artists, we seek the Truth through Beauty; and when I say Beauty I spell it with a capital B, because Beauty, as I understand it, is more than a noun — it is religion. Now, to my eyes, Beauty exists wherever man does not intrude the ugly work of his hands. The world, if left to itself, would be universally beautiful, and in like manner a man's soul, if isolated and uncontaminated by man-created ugliness, would of necessity be beautiful. A child's soul, for example, is beautiful — how long? Why, until the child learns to talk and to hear and to understand the evil of

men. In short, it is the herding of men together in cities and communities, it is the daily contact with artificiality, it is the galling yoke that we call modern civilization that has banished Beauty out of our lives and so has banished Truth.

"Granting (and I am sure you will grant it) that if a man have no responsibilities he will be happy, we may go on to say that if he be happy he will be in tune with the beautiful, and receptive to Beauty. What, then, is the lesson? Does it not cry aloud in your ears? Be free! Throw off the shackles of civilization that weigh you down, go forth into the world, keep close to the Beauty that the gods have revealed to you in nature and, casting down your false idols, bow the knee only to her. Cease to be slaves — be free!"

He sat down to great applause. Perhaps they were in a mood to applaud anything, for they were unaccustomed to champagne at sixteen francs the bottle. Taillandy drained his glass, refilled it, and drained it again. Then he turned to Diane: "Do not forget," he said; "we leave at dawn to-morrow."

"Do you think I could forget?" she reproached him.

But they did not leave at the dawn of the morrow; for at that hour Taillandy was sleeping most uncomfortably on Bruno's sofa, whither he had been carried with difficulty by three well-meaning but unsteady friends. As for Diane, she had cried herself to sleep in a room over the café that Madame Maupin had placed at her disposal for the night. She was up and dressed, however, at daybreak, hoping against hope that her hero would not forget to come for her; and she waited, sad-eyed at the door, watching the stars pale in the face of the glow that came slowly out of the east, watching the roofs and the chimney-pots take form against a lightening sky, watching the shadows of the houses stretch their blue lengths along the street.

Madame Maupin, descending cheerfully from a dreamless sleep, found her at a table by the door, with her

face in her hands. Madame Maupin, taking in the situation with the intuition of a true Frenchwoman, strove to console her, saying: "Come, my little cabbage, you must not cry. He will be back, and there are a great many more mornings ahead of you. He is doubtless a little tired, that is all, and if he is tired you surely do not begrudge him his sleep."

Diane dried her eyes and tried to smile.

"Yes, yes," she said. "I am very foolish. But I love him so much, Madame Maupin."

"Of course you do. Every one does. He is a wonderful man, Monsieur Ferdinand is. And a great poet. You must remember that and make allowances; for all great poets get drunk. They tell me that Monsieur Paul Verlaine was — well, no matter. I do not remember him, and he is dead now. But he was a great poet and a wonderful drinker, too."

Diane, never having heard of Monsieur Paul Verlaine, was of course not greatly interested. She felt that it was all the fault of Paris — that it was Paris that was reaching out hideous, soiled hands to drag her idol from his pedestal. And it was then that the high resolve came to her to save Ferdinand from this soul-devouring monster. I doubt if the irony of the situation entered her mind. I doubt if she remembered that originally it had been he who was to save *her* from the maw of Paris, who was to "pluck the flower from the mire of a Christian city and plant it in the garden of the gods."

At eleven o'clock a perfectly cheerful Taillandy swung into the café, arm-in-arm with Bruno and *le petit* Martel, and found a Diane, serene and resolved, there to receive him.

He kissed her good morning on the forehead, inquired how she had slept, was glad that Madame Maupin had extended her hospitality, and, worst of all, asked Madame Maupin if she would be good enough to repeat the offer that night or any other night should it be necessary. He would gladly pay the bill.

"But," ventured Diane, "do we not leave to-morrow surely?"

"Of course, my little one," he answered—"of course. To-morrow at dawn. But it is well to be prepared in case something should intervene to delay us."

Then, complaining of a headache, he ordered absinthe for three and a *sirop de groseille* for Diane. And he took occasion to warn her never to drink absinthe—it was very injurious and led to all sorts of follies. Diane assured him that she would always abstain from it. She was uncomfortable; her heart was heavy; she wished that Bruno were not present—she hated Bruno—and she believed that, if she were allowed an hour alone with Taillandy, she could persuade him to return to his gods. But Bruno and *le petit* Martel, anticipating perhaps another evening similar to the last, stuck close to Taillandy's elbow, and saw to it that his glass (and their own glasses) remained full.

III

The first four days that Taillandy spent in Paris had a striking similarity. I have pictured one of them, endeavoring to deal with the poet's temporary downfall as leniently and as delicately as possible. Even average men have their evil moments and are held excusable; how much more readily, then, must we condone the lapses of a genius! I do not pretend that he was blameless, but, remember, he had passed eight years alone, and the reaction was bound to be extreme.

On the evening of the fourth day, when Diane saw that all the signs and omens pointed to another festival night, she took matters into her own hands and made a decisive step. Strange as it may seem, it was Bruno who aided her in her scheme to get Taillandy out of the city. Perhaps Bruno, being more advanced in years, was tiring of dissipation; perhaps his heart was really excellent at

bottom; perhaps he cared for Diane more unselfishly than he chose openly to admit. At any rate he rendered her invaluable assistance.

It was he who interviewed the owner and driver of the covered, two-wheeled market-cart, arranging with him that he should be at the Closerie des Lilas at two o'clock that morning.

"No vegetables, my friend," said Bruno; "we want no vegetables, but we desire plenty of straw on the floor in order that a stuffed turkey may repose comfortably thereupon. And it will be a large turkey—a hundred and fifty pounds."

The driver of the cart, disturbed at this, crossed himself violently.

"It is not a corpse that monsieur wishes me to drive in my wagon?"

Bruno laughed cheerfully.

"Not quite," he answered. "It will be breathing—fire and alcohol; but it will be breathing. Beyond that I promise nothing."

The driver was scarcely reassured. However, if it breathed, if monsieur guaranteed that it would breathe—well, for five francs more he would take the chance. So it was arranged.

"I have ordered Ferdinand's hearse," Bruno reported to Diane.

She cried out in horror. He must not say such things; and she, too, crossed herself precipitately.

At seven o'clock, the hour of dinner, when the fête usually commenced, the Closerie des Lilas was packed to the doors. All the guests were present, hungry, thirsty, licking their lips, but—there was no host.

"Where is he?" whispered Bruno to Diane.

"Where is he?" echoed *le petit* Martel.

"Where is he?" muttered the two veterans who remembered Delacroix.

"Where is he?" chorused the models and the midinettes and the daughters of joy.

Every one had the question, but no one the answer. Taillandy had not been seen by any one for over two hours. Each thought that he had been with one of the others. It was very strange.

At eight o'clock, with much grumbling, the guests were forced to order their own dinners, which, owing perhaps to the obnoxious prospect of paying the check out of their own pockets, they ate with little relish. Moreover, there was no sparkling wine of Champagne to flavor the meats, and no Taillandy to talk glorious nonsense.

Diane reluctantly, and for want of any plan of action, took her seat between Bruno and *le petit* Martel; but she kept her eyes steadfastly on the door and replied to all conversational efforts only in monosyllables. Nor did she eat.

As the hour advanced the gloom deepened. Bruno and *le petit* Martel, bored and fatigued, hazarded brutal guesses at the cause of Taillandy's non-appearance.

Said Bruno: "He is doubtless drunk in some other café."

Said *le petit* Martel: "It is probable that he has left Paris and gone back alone to converse with his gods."

It was this latter conjecture that hurt Diane the more. She had planned to save him and he had forgotten her very existence. His promises to her had been empty words. Heart-searing thoughts, these.

"Have no fear," she answered Bruno and *le petit* Martel bravely—"have no fear. He will come when he is ready."

"And you," insinuated Bruno, "will wait for him?"

"Yes," she said, "and I will wait for him."

"You are very faithful," observed *le petit* Martel with a snicker.

She flushed a little but let the remark pass. She did not choose to explain to them that she was Taillandy's disciple—not his mistress. Besides, something told her

that they would not understand, that they would wink and nudge each other and snicker, even as *le petit* Martel had already snickered.

The clock struck twelve times — twelve weary, discouraged strokes. A few chairs were pushed back, a few checks (very modest ones) were paid, and a few of the guests yawned unaffectedly, said "He will not come," and departed. The two veterans who remembered Delacroix called for the backgammon-board, and immediately forgot the passage of time.

The clock struck the half-hour — timidly, unobtrusively, as if ashamed of itself. The Beaux-Arts students went gloomily home. Bruno lit his pipe and ordered a cognac and coffee. *Le petit* Martel, with a show of bravado, called for a bottle of champagne, then discreetly changed his mind and substituted a yellow chartreuse. They, at least, were determined to see it out if they were forced to remain there until dawn. Diane sat in silence, very tired, very miserable, ready to cry.

The clock struck one, surreptitiously, that the people might perhaps think it was merely the half-hour. Hippolyte began to clear the tables and to pile up the chairs for the night. Madame Maupin was stacking up the day's receipts in little piles of copper, silver, and gold. The gold pile, she noted, was miserably small that evening.

And then, before the clock was forced to strike again, the door swung violently open and in came Taillandy, hatless, his hair on end, intoxicated, but not with wine. Intoxicated, rather, with the sense of great accomplishment.

He greeted no one, but cried loudly and exultantly: "I have done it! It is completed — and in six hours. Never have I worked so rapidly and so well. For it is good, my friends, it is good. Listen and judge for yourselves if it is not good. Oh, but I was in the vein to-night! I was tired — very tired — and I smoked fifty vile cigarettes and wrote fifty immortal lines. You see,

I am not modest. That is because I *know* that it is good."

He was tremendously excited. There was a flush on his cheek-bones as of fever, and a feverish light burned in his eyes. The two sheets of paper that he held trembled and rattled in his hands as he stood in the middle of the room and began to read.

What he read was his "Hymn to Diana Imprisoned." We have all read it and recognized it as his greatest lyric; and we all remember, surely, the last quatrain, which some one has translated, poorly enough:

"Why dost thou tarry in the haunts of men?
Cast off the chains that bind thee, burst the bars!
The high gods call and, pleading, call again —
Come forth and live beneath the singing stars!"

Put that back into Taillandy's French and let Taillandy stand up and declaim it to you, and I warrant you 'll feel a shiver of exhilaration run up your spine. For Taillandy knew how to read his verse—there is no gain-saying that.

When he finished he had them all fairly on their feet. The women, not understanding much of what he read them, nevertheless wept from sheer excitement, Madame Maupin the most conspicuously and copiously, Diane the most quietly. But there was a good bit of relief mingled with Diane's tears. She had her hero back, more of a hero than ever. Her idol's feet were not of clay but of gold. What woman could resist weeping with such excellent cause?

Vaguely she sensed that the invocation was addressed to her, that the poet had passed his evening in solitude, making her immortal in immortal verse, that, far from being forgotten by him, she had been ever before his inward eyes.

Triumphantly the clock struck two. Bruno was the only one to heed it; and he approached Diane and murmured "It is two o'clock. The hearse should be at

the door. Or shall we call it the triumphal chariot of fire that will bear him, like Elijah, up to heaven?"

Before Diane could reply the driver of the two-wheeled cart squeezed his broad bulk through the door. He stood there, whip in hand, searching the room for his clients.

"What do you want?" inquired Taillandy, who was nearest him.

"My passengers," answered the driver.

"And who are they?" the poet persisted.

"God knows," said the driver. "But one of them, they told me, would be very drunk."

"I am very drunk," said Taillandy. "Wine never made me more so. Moreover, I see no one else who is in that condition. Accordingly I retain you. Is your wagon comfortable?"

"There is plenty of straw," answered the driver.

"Good. You are hired, then, until dawn; and we start at once."

He went to Diane and took her by the hand.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"I am ready," said she.

"Then come. Let us return to the true gods who are calling to us."

He bowed very low, first to Madame Maupin, then to the room in general.

"Adieu," said he. "I earnestly hope that come day you will open your eyes and see that you are slaves."

With Diane on his arm he passed out of the door into the night. The cart stood at the curb, the huge *percheron* smoking in the chilly air. The driver climbed up into his seat, and Taillandy lifted Diane in his arms and placed her in the straw under the canvas cover. Then he himself took his seat beside the driver.

"You will be cold," suggested the latter.

"You are wrong," answered the poet; "I am on fire."

"As you will, *m'sieu'*. Where shall I drive to?"

Taillandy bent toward him and whispered in his ear.

"*B'en, m'sieu'*," said the driver. "I know the road well."

IV

At dawn — a white, cold dawn that turned the frost to silver — a covered two-wheeled cart jolted and rumbled into the public square of the village of Evremont-sur-Seine. Taillandy sat upright on the driver's seat, with the cold light on his gaunt face and a warmer light glowing in his eyes. Behind him, on the straw, lay Diane, sleeping like a child, with a child's smile at her lips.

"To the right here," said Taillandy softly, when they had crossed the square. "To the right, and then directly to the left. The shop next to the church."

The driver, obeying directions, drew up in front of a small two-story plaster house, the ground floor of which was devoted to a shop. In the windows were crucifixes, artificial wreaths, embroidered altar-cloths, and little gilded and painted images of saints. It was the last place one would have expected a pagan to visit.

But Taillandy, with no hesitation, rapped gently on the door, casting a benevolent glance, meanwhile, on the emblems of Roman Catholicism.

"It is well," he said to himself, "that there should be such people in the world. Does it matter, after all, what kindles the flame so long as it burns brightly?"

An elderly woman came to open the door — a woman with a face like one of her graven saints.

"Madame Nicolas," said Taillandy bowing, "you are awake early. May I come in to warm myself?"

"Certainly," she said. "Be good enough to enter. I am just now lighting the fire in the stove."

He insisted on helping her with the coals. Then he said: "Madame Nicolas, you do not, of course, remember me. It is eighteen years since I used to come to this shop. I remember you, because you are the sort of woman one does not forget. I am called Ferdinand Taillandy."

"I remember you now, Monsieur Ferdinand," she answered. "You were an interesting boy."

"I take no credit for that," he disclaimed. "All boys are interesting. It is only men and women that are occasionally dull."

He hesitated an instant. Then he said: "Madame Nicolas, are your two daughters well?"

"Véronique is very well," she answered him quietly. "She is in the kitchen. Diane"—she faltered a little—"Diane has left us. She—she is working in Paris. We miss her a great deal."

"Ah," said Taillandy—"exactly."

Madame Nicolas searched his eyes anxiously with hers.

"Madame Nicolas," he continued abruptly after a silence—"Madame Nicolas, do you own a calf?"

"But no, Monsieur Ferdinand!" she exclaimed, surprised.

"That is a pity," he mused. "I regret that you do not own a calf."

"What should I do with a calf?"

"Kill it, of course," he replied brightly—"kill it! In honor of your daughter who is returned to you."

Madame Nicolas half-rose from her chair; then she fell back weakly, trembling.

"Diane," she breathed, "you have news of my Diane?"

"I have more than news, Madame Nicolas, I have Diane herself. She is asleep out there in the covered cart."

"God is merciful," said Madame Nicolas. "He has, in his own good time, answered my prayers."

"So be it," murmured the pagan. "Be very kind to Diane, for she has suffered much."

"Let me go to her," said Madame Nicolas. "My arms ache to hold her."

They went out into the chill morning. But Madame Nicolas did not know that it was cold. Taillandy raised the canvas flap at the back of the cart. Diane still slept on the straw, her head pillowed on her arm. As they

watched her she stirred and sat upright, the smile still at her lips, for she had been happy in her sleep.

"Diane!" cried Madame Nicolas. "My blessed baby Diane — my blessed child!"

Taillandy turned away, pretending to shade his eyes from the sun.

"These Christians," he muttered, "are over-demonstrative." And he brushed a tear impatiently from his nose. When he had hardened himself sufficiently to look around without betraying his lamentable weakness, he saw that he was forgotten. Diane was gathered close to Madame Nicolas's breast, and Madame Nicolas was crooning over her softly, as if, indeed, she were a child.

The poet and pagan shrugged his shoulders with a feeble imitation of his old bravado.

"I fear, Ferdinand," he said to himself — "I fear that you have lost a disciple. Your creed does not seem to be popular. However, you have done to-day what I suppose they would call a 'Christian deed.' *Ainsi soit.*"

He climbed once more up into the driver's seat.

"Where now, *m'sieu*?" asked the driver stolidly.

"Where?" repeated the pagan. "Anywhere! Get me away from these Christians. They are weakening to a man's resolution. They sap his manliness. They appeal insidiously to the maudlin, sentimental side of his nature. Bah! That sun is very glaring, driver. Do you see how it makes my eyes water? Turn around and face the south, and flog your horse a little. What was it that King Agrippa said in their Bible? Ah, I have it now: 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' Flog your horse, driver — flog your horse! I must get out of here. It is dangerous, I tell you — dangerous. Flog your horse, driver, and drive me to the south — to the south where the nereids are laughing and leaping and calling to one another across the waves of the far-resounding sea. Farewell, Diane — adieu. I go back alone to the gods."

Obediently the driver plied his whip, the horse broke

into a heavy, swaying trot, the cart bounced and rattled over the cobblestones, and Ferdinand Taillandy, pagan and poet, became once more a wanderer on the face of the earth.